The religious troubles in France /

A. Gasquet

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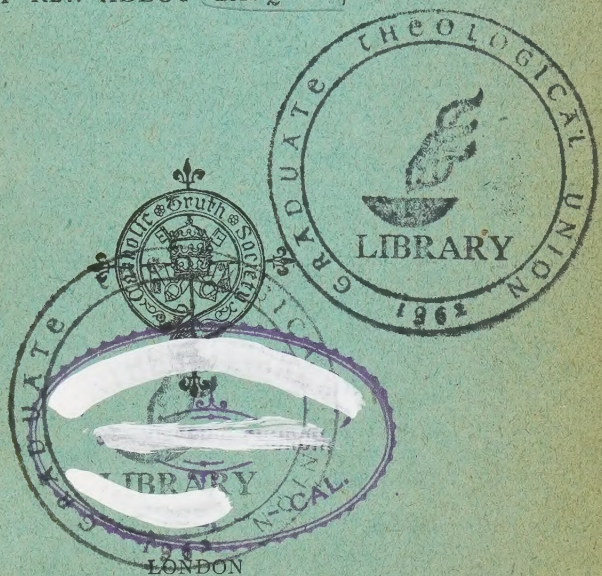
THE RELIGIOUS TROUBLES IN FRANCE:

THEIR ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT

BY THE

RIGHT REV. ABBOT GASQUET, O.S.B.



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THE RELIGIOUS TROUBLES IN FRANCE: THEIR ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT [1]

By the RIGHT REV. ABBOT GASQUET, O.S.B.

It has been usual, I believe, to devote the inaugural address at the Conferences of this Society to some subject of immediate interest to Catholics. Supposing this to be so, I make no apology for bringing before you this evening some considerations upon the religious condition of France and the persecuting policy of those now in power in that country. Not only is the subject important in itself, calling for our sympathetic interest; but we have, I think, a right to complain that the English press generally has been so ill-informed, or, what is the same thing, has kept us so very much in the dark as to what has really taken place across the Channel, and as to the great principles at issue in the struggle. The consequence is that the nation has a very inadequate notion of contemporary events which would certainly shock its profound religious sense and its equally deep sense of justice and fair dealing.

Only the other day I was speaking with one who for many years had been on the staff of one of our great London daily papers: he is an Englishman of unusually acute intelligence and sound judgement, and his views about the troubles which are afflicting France had been exclusively derived from the accounts which had appeared in the ordinary journals. As far as he had grasped the situation at all, the whole difficulty appeared most simple: it lay in the refusal of the regular Orders to adapt themselves to a very reasonable law, and in the illegal position taken up by most of the bishops in supporting them in their unreason-

[1] The Inaugural Address at the Catholic Conference, Liverpool, 1903.

able disobedience. It was difficult to make him credit my assertion that the only scheme to regularize religious associations which had been proposed by the French Government was really one of dissolution, accompanied by the seizure of all the property of such religious bodies, or "liquidation" of their goods, as it is euphemistically called. "But this," he exclaimed, when he had at length been brought to understand the true position, "this is an injustice compared with which the injustice of the Dreyfus affair, which stirred the heart of the English nation to its very depths, was as nothing." Quite so; and it is not, we may be sure, the sense of the English nation that is wanting; but a knowledge of the facts of the case. It is for this reason that I propose to lay before you this evening —although I am speaking to an audience that no doubt has knowledge and consequently sympathy—some of the main points in the present situation. Let us perhaps hope that what we say here may be passed on to others and may help to open their eyes; though this may be difficult and take time, and much telling. "The great difficulty," says Ruskin, "is to open men's eyes. To touch their feelings and break their hearts is easy: the difficulty is to break their heads" and let the light in.

To understand the situation rightly it is necessary to recognize the principles at issue; and to grasp these effectively we must go back a long way—to the year 1789. Between religion and the world, or, let us say, between the Church and the State, history teaches us—even if we had not Our Lord's own forecast of the relations to be expected—that there must at times arise difficulties more or less grave. Three only solutions of the relation between them are possible: (1) there may be a national religion, (2) or a Concordat between the Holy See and the State, or (3) complete separation. All these three solutions have been tried in France since the year 1789.

The first—the *nationalization* of the Church—was tried in the revolutionary period of 1790–1794 and, of course, it failed utterly for obvious reasons. The civil constitution of the clergy was drawn up in full accord with the principles of the Revolution then in vogue; and as France had then professedly gone back to the pagan world for its patterns and its models, the official conception of religion derived therefrom

was, that it was a function of the State. There was to be a *pontifex* as there was to be a *consul*, and the priest was to be a moral officer, a preaching magistrate, a *fonctionnaire* with a State licence and a State status, set apart to work in the State department of religion. The scheme failed mainly because the designers took no account of the fact that all real religion was essentially something apart from the natural order: and inasmuch as it was supernatural it could not be ultimately regulated by the power of the Crown, or shaped to accord with every policy of State, or even permanently controlled by any secular authority. All history teaches us plainly that religion must exist, and always has existed, only in so far as it corresponds to a need of humanity which the State has no power to satisfy. If in 1790 the Catholic Church could have allowed itself to be absorbed into the State in the way proposed, it would have lost its vital principle. It would have ceased to be the Catholic Church. "It would have ceased to be a faith, or indeed even a thought or sentiment, and have become a mere fashion."

"From 1790–1795," says that acute writer and eminent member of the Académie Française M. Emile Faguet, "the clergy and the Constituants were entirely wrong in their idea of a Church." They were wrong precisely because they did not understand that religion has to do with '*country*' and not with government, and that the functions of the Government are not the same as those of 'the country.' The Catholic religion, precisely because it is Catholic, is universal and is the same religion existing in all countries. It assumes national characteristics, it is true, in different countries; is Spanish in Spain, English in England, and Italian in Italy; but it is the same religion in all countries, and so, if it be Catholic, it cannot be nationalized or fashioned and formed by any government; it cannot be cast into any one stereotyped mould by any secular power; it can never be made an official department of any one State.

The third solution—separation of Church and State—was tried in A.D. 1795. The idea had indeed always been prominent during the period of the Revolution, but when the actual separation came the religious *régime* of the *Directoire* lasted only two and a half years. After a brief period for consideration and experiment, Napoleon I. in

1801 entered into the *Concordat* with Pius VII. by which the government of the Church is still supposed to be regulated. Some such agreement between the Pope and the temporal rulers of France, was, of course, nothing new. In one form or other, indeed, it had existed from the time of the great St. Louis. The treaty as to the government of the Church in France, between Francis I. and Pope Leo X., endeavoured to remove all causes of friction by a careful division of the purely spiritual sphere from the temporal adjuncts, necessary to a Church endowed with great possessions. Even up to the eve of the Revolution this method of solving the difficulties between Church and State was in force, and it was found in practice to work well. In reality it is to the existence of this Concordat that M. Hanotaux, the statesman and historian, attributes the fact that France was saved to the Catholic Church in the time of the great religious revolt of the Reformation.

In coming to his agreement, or Concordat, with the Holy See, Napoleon was certainly not actuated by any love for the religion of his country. To him it was merely a matter of State politics. It was necessary, for instance, to wipe out the great debt which the nation owed to the Church on account of the confiscations of the Revolution. This required the Pope's sanction, and this sacrifice of temporal possessions was the price paid for the measure of protection to religion secured by the Concordat, and for the guaranteed, though slender, stipends to be paid to the clergy by the State. Napoleon, too, thought he saw in the Concordat a means for rivetting on the hands of the priests the chains which already bound them to the Government and fettered their practical freedom of action. Had he been dealing with any human institution this crafty plan for keeping the Church in servitude would in all probability have succeeded. Looking back, however, over the century that has passed, it must strike any reflecting mind how wonderful has been the action and progress of the Church of France in spite of its legalized bonds. Napoleon hoped to find in the clergy, so governed, hampered in their action, and kept in decent poverty, what he called a "gendarmerie spirituelle"—his moral policemen—whose duty and interest it would be to support his new imperial throne. And certainly during the nineteenth century the Church of

France in ceasing to be rich, and in being mostly dependent upon the miserable State stipends, has indeed lost much of its freedom and independence of action. Its clergy would have become—or, let us say, might have become—the mere functionaries of the Government which Napoleon had looked for, but for the fact that they had in Rome and the Pope a rallying-point outside the limits of their own kingdom. As a direct though unforeseen result of Napoleon's policy, they became in fact more and more part of the great cosmopolitan body of the Church Catholic. Their very servitude and poverty is at least sufficient to account for this most significant fact, that the very name "Gallican Church" has now passed into the domain of the archæologist.

Whether under the Empire, the Monarchy, or the Republic, the great Church of France during the nineteenth century has done its duty as well, and as conscientiously, as before the Revolution. It has not, however, all been peace. At times the Church has had to fight for its principles, as it will have to do again now, with vigour and determination. The Church of Christ, for example, has always claimed, and will always claim, liberty to speak, to write, and to teach. It could not help doing so; and it defied the omnipotence asserted by the State when it claimed to stop its freedom of action in all such matters as pertained to its spiritual mission. In one thing, for instance, its protests and struggles were necessary for its very life, and caused considerable conflicts in the first half of the last century. "Liberty of association," about which we have heard so much during the past months, did not really exist in a legal sense in France, and the Church especially suffered from this. "Association," says a great French writer, "is the form and indeed the essence of the Church's life. By definition, and etymology even, the Church is an association." The Church in France existed indeed legally as a body, but merely as a body of officials belonging to one administration. All association, whether for spreading the faith, for good works, even for the purposes of edification or teaching, was not contemplated by the law. The Church, however, never ceased to vindicate for herself this liberty "as essential to its development, its life, and its very existence." Beyond this the clergy claimed liberty to teach. Why should they not do so? As citizens

the priests would seem to have the right of every son of France; and as clergy, they claimed for parents, as every Catholic priest must ever claim, the right to have their children taught as they would desire. The State also put forward a claim to control the education of its future citizens, and then came the conflict. The Church resisted the demand of the State to be considered the sole educator, first by resting on the "declaration of the rights of man" and the claim of citizenship, and then by demanding to be treated according to the principles of liberty it did not itself profess. In 1849, however, the Church indicated for itself the right of teaching: or rather the popular vote gave it to them, and it is this liberty which has now been already partially destroyed and which we to-day see wholly threatened, on the ground that to allow the Church to teach is to place too much political power in its hands. But it is indeed curious to note that the present state of affairs in France hardly seems to show that the Church has managed to possess itself of much political power, during the half century it has been occupied in education.

We may now turn to the situation of the religious Orders in France, and consider the legal status which they possessed under the Concordat and indeed until recent times. It has been frequently asserted that in the agreement made by Napoleon with the Pope, the religious Orders were purposely excluded. It is indeed true that by the legislation of 1789, and subsequent years, the French Congregations were suppressed, and also that they are not specifically mentioned in the restoration of religion under the Concordat. But it has been shown conclusively by the Comte de Mun that they are really included in the first article of that treaty which guarantees the "full and free exercise of the Roman Catholic Apostolic religion." How can there be a "full and free exercise" of the Catholic religion when the Regular life is prohibited? Is not the Regular life, though, perhaps, not necessary to the essence of the Catholic faith, certainly an integral portion of its full development? Moreover, the work of the Comte Boulay de la Meruthe on *La Négociation du Concordat*, makes it certain that the Pope desired and strongly urged that the Religious Orders should be expressly mentioned in the document, and that the First Consul was unwilling to include them, not because they were thought

to be prohibited, but precisely because he desired they should be regarded as purely religious societies, not needing State recognition but depending for their creation and regulation upon "a Brief (if the Sovereign Pontiff) should deem it expedient." If other proof was wanting that the Concordat in no way contemplated the suppression of the regular Orders, we should still have the fact that in spite of the laws of 1789, 1790, and of 1792; in spite of the silence of the Concordat; in spite of Article XI. of the organic articles, the religious Congregations had already reappeared three or four years before the date of the Concordat. Houses, schools and hospitals had been opened by religious not merely in secret, not merely with the tacit recognition of the Government, but with the direct approval and encouragement of the State. "I ask of any man of good faith," writes M. de Mun, "whether in the face of these facts it is possible to pretend that the silence of the Concordat can be interpreted as meaning the suppression of the religious Congregations."

From the reconstitution of order under Napoleon as Consul, for many years, and probably for half a century, it was considered useful for religious Congregations to secure the protection of the State by obtaining *authorization* under some *ordonnance*, or patent. In this way, whether under the Empire, the Monarchy, or the Republic, large numbers of religious houses and Congregations became known as *authorized*. Side by side with these, however, there grew up others which did not desire and so did not ask for State recognition, and the tendency has been for these latter to increase in number, especially since 1877, and in consequence of the uncertainty which followed the Ferry laws of 1880. It has been suggested, and in the British press we may frequently see it asserted as incontrovertible, or assumed as self-evident, that the non-authorized religious bodies, which came in 1900 to be more numerous even than the authorized congregations, were illegal. This is a completely wrong view of their position. The laws of 1817 and 1825 only require authorization in the case of such bodies as desire to obtain State recognition for their own purposes, so as to secure the advantages which follow from the possession of the civil status or personality secured by legal existence. Until the recent law

of 1901 the non-authorized Congregations, though not recognized by the State, were not in any way illicit. It is necessary to bear this in mind, because it has been the policy of M. Combes to suggest the opposite, and to endeavour to rob the Congregations of the sympathy. of law-abiding people, by representing them as rebels and law-breakers who did not dare to place themselves in relation with the State. "It cannot be too often repeated," says the Comte de Mun, "that until July 1, 1901, the non-recognized Congregations were within their rights (in remaining non-authorized); their existence was licit though they could obtain no civil personality" (or existence).

Authorization then gave to the religious houses that possessed it a legal status, and it was M. Waldeck-Rousseau's professed wish in his Bill of 1901 to furnish a ready means for all religious to *regularize* their position by obtaining authorization. He was anxious—if we may accept his reiterated expressions—whilst making unauthorized Congregations henceforth illegal in France, to extend the approval of the State to all bodies which applied for it and complied with certain formal conditions, such as the making of a general statement as to the ends and object of their institutions and of the extent of their property and means of support.

Better informed, no doubt, as to the real intentions of the party now in power in France than those who relied upon the words of M. Waldeck-Rousseau and trusted to his reiterated assertions that the object of his Bill was not to destroy the Orders, but to afford them a legal position in the State, some religious bodies at once took refuge in other countries, preferring even expatriation to the greater evils that might perhaps befall them if they asked for an authorization, which they foresaw would be denied them. It will be remembered that many, even among Catholics in this country, thought that those who thus gave up early in the struggle were ill-advised, and that events would prove them to have read wrongly the signs of the times. Unfortunately this has not been the case; but the fate of the religious who made their applications for authorization, with full faith in the honesty of M. Waldeck-Rousseau, has shown how little honesty, or justice, or fair dealing remains to-day in the Government of France.

Of those that remained, fifty-four Congregations of men and a great number of Congregations of women, said to comprise in all some 6,000 houses, sent in their applications for recognition. Most of these had long been established on the soil of France. A great many of them had for three-quarters of a century openly carried on the purposes for which they were established without let or hindrance: they had been in constant and official communication with State authorities in regard to their work, and they had enjoyed the confidence and respect of the public and municipal bodies in the places where their good works were carried on. They came in good faith to Parliament to submit to the new regulations and to ask for the authorization required by the new law.

The case of some was peculiar. Their submission to the supreme authority of the State was the result of a scrupulous wish to obey the law, and they came to ask for authorization not because they thought they needed it or that they did not in fact possess it, but because they wished to show that they were law-abiding citizens in all things. Their action was the natural result of the advice given by M. Waldeck-Rousseau to the Congregations of Savoy on June 28, 1901. "I think," he said, "that it would be prudent for them, as indeed for all who are in any particular condition, to ask for the authorization which will insure them against every kind of risk." Let us take the Collège Anglais, Douai, as an example perhaps most of interest to us. The English Benedictines had possessed a college there for the last three-quarters of a century. The property was British and had been almost continuously in the possession of our Congregation since the beginning of the seventeenth century. Even in the Reign of Terror it had been respected as the property of the English subjects when the French religious houses were dissolved and their goods confiscated, until it was seized on the outbreak of the war between the two countries not because the monks were monks, but because they were English. On the restoration of the property after the Treaty of Paris, it was administered by a bureau in Paris as British property; and the students were, since 1826, appointed to the various burses with the full knowledge and approbation of the Minister of Interior. The existence of the college

was thus constantly brought before the officials of the State, and these dealings with them alone surely constituted an authorization in itself. Moreover, not so many years ago it was necessary to obtain a lease of the buildings at Douai from the Bureau for the purpose of carrying on the school, and this lease, with several years yet to run, was approved and signed by the President of the Republic, M. Carnot, and by the Minister of Public Instruction. As ours was in some ways considered a special position it was thought prudent to take the advice of M. Waldeck-Rousseau and to apply "for the authorization which would insure (us) against all risk." Personally, I will confess it, I never imagined that this was more than a mere matter of form and that in due course we should receive the authorization. The result you know. Our application was not even considered: we were executed with the rest *en bloc*, and the first intimation that we really received of our fate was the appearance of a liquidator at the college gates and the seizure of our goods and chattels, though we were British subjects. To-day the actual end has come. The three months of grace given to us has run out, and the Collège Anglais, which for so long has been associated with the name of Douai, from to-day (July 6, 1903) no longer exists. By a curious chance the hospitality accorded during three centuries to English Catholics by the French nation at Douai is violently terminated on the very day that President Loubet lands in England on his official visit.

The whole process has been as arbitrary as it has been unjust, for Douai is but a sample of an immense number of other religious houses. M. Combes arranges things as he pleases. Just as it pleased him by a stroke of the pen to close four thousand free schools, so it pleased him, in assigning to the Senate and the Chamber the demands for authorization which were to be divided between them, to hand six to the former and fifty-four to the latter. The accompanying suggestion to the Chamber of Deputies for the rejection of all of them *en bloc* was agreed to without difficulty or delay, and the "right of control of the Senate," which exists according to the Constitution of the Republic, in this case, by this Parliamentary *coup d'état*, was ignored. The matter was made simplicity itself by the action of M. Rabier, the "Reporter" of the measure before the

Chamber of Deputies. "Of what use is it," he asked in substance, "to discuss the ends and objects of the Congregations who have asked for authorization? We have no call to judge them as we do not mean to authorize them. Our intention is to condemn them and refuse their application, and so to destroy them under the new law." This was the view taken by M. Combes' majority; and all those who at M. Waldeck-Rousseau's invitation had presented themselves for "regularization" found their petitions rudely dismissed without consideration.

It would be interesting to know something of the ex-Prime Minister's inmost feelings to-day. In the Chamber and in the Senate in 1901 he defended his law on the ground that authorization would be granted or refused on the merits of each case, and he rejected indignantly an amendment which proposed the suppression of all existing non-authorized congregations. In the Senate, in reply to a suggestion that there was *parti pris* and that by the brute force of a majority the Orders would be condemned precisely because they were Orders, M. Waldeck-Rousseau exclaimed: "As to saying that Parliament will not grant authorization, in my opinion this is to make short work of its functions. Can you believe that the French Chambers, in face of honest statutes showing openly a reasonable, philanthropic end or one of social interest, will be animated by any absolute *parti pris* and will say: 'This is a Congregation, we refuse it authorization'?"

M. Waldeck-Rousseau's speeches also, that were posted up in every commune of France, bear witness to his engagements and to his reiterated promises in the matter. The electors, on the strength of those declarations, were assured again and again that the Government had no thought of suppressing the Congregations, and that it was in fact pledged to authorize those that would obey the new law and take the necessary steps to legalize their position. It is a complete misrepresentation to say, as the English papers have so frequently done of late, that M. Combes was returned to power with a large majority on purpose to decree the abolition of the religious Orders, and that in refusing to grant the authorization asked by them, he was merely carrying out the mandate he had received. This

issue was never before the country at all; on the contrary, the electors in every part of France had before their eyes, in the bills posted up by the authority of the Parliament, M. Waldeck-Rousseau's own promises in regard to authorization, and his indignant denials that any measure of suppression was intended; and, if they had any doubts upon the matter at all, they were set at rest by like pledges on the part of those that sought their suffrages.

In an eloquent passage of his pamphlet on the situation, M. le Comte de Mun describes the result of the complete confidence in the justice and honest dealing of M. Waldeck-Rousseau and his successor M. Combes.

"The flood (let loose by the former) is passing on its way, sweeping on in a sad and glorious medley, towards the obscure paths of proscription, confiscation, and exile into which those others had already preceded them whom the first blast of the tempest had uprooted. It is a crowd of innocent victims we see; a body of men of all ages guilty only of being faithful to the name they bear and to the habit that clothes them. They are there, fifteen or twenty thousand of them, up to the last moment wholly occupied in serving their God, in praying to Him, in teaching His law, in educating the children of the people, in serving the sick and visiting the poor, or in spreading abroad in every land under the heavens the name of Jesus and that of France."

Then come the nuns. Already the refusal of authorization has come upon them as upon their brethren in religion. Thousands of poor unfortunate ladies have been turned adrift into the world whose only fault is that they have associated to serve God in prayer and good works. Thousands of them have grown old in the cloister and are thus unfitted to begin life again. Most of them are poor and unable to support themselves in any new sphere of work, and still less able to begin life afresh in any new country where they can enjoy the liberty to serve God which is denied them in their own. In all parts of England, our bishops tell the same tale of the piteous stories of these exiled ladies who, without means of any sort, or with means of the slenderest kind, have applied and are applying to them to be permitted to set up new homes in our midst, in the vain hopes of being able to

earn their bread by a little teaching, or a little nursing. It would be cruel not to undeceive them at once, but these numerous requests have of late added greatly to the anxieties, as the need of refusal has to the sorrows of our bishops. What is before these ladies no man can tell, and already we hear of nuns whose only course has been to seek dispensation from their vows and to hope to find the necessaries of life in taking up work in domestic service, or in serving as shop-women behind the counters of the Parisian millinery establishments.

Even when by the force of the law the monasteries and convents have been closed, the Congregations dissolved, and the inmates dismissed, the unfortunate religious frequently finds himself or herself still under the iron heel of the law. If he preach or lecture after his secularization, which as a priest he has surely a right to do, he can be prosecuted as recalcitrant and punished. By M. Combes, circular of April last the bishops were directed not to allow ex-religious to use the pulpits of their dioceses, and their refusal to be bound by such an arbitrary exercise of authority has been punished in certain cases by the suspension of their very inadequate salaries. In one case with which I am acquainted, two secularized religious were received out of charity by the Superior of a diocesan college as assistant teachers: immediately the college itself was closed by orders received from Paris. In another instance two nuns belonging to one family, after obtaining dispensation from their vows, were received into their father's house. Here incautiously they began to busy themselves in works of piety and, this becoming known, they received a visit from a commissary of police, who informed them that two ex-religious living together according to the law formed a "Congregation."

Hundreds of other instances could be given of the harsh and deliberately cruel treatment which has been meted out to the members of the dissolved congregations. Taking the figures given by M. Waldeck-Rousseau in the debates of 1901 as correct, there were seventy-five thousand religious to be dealt with, in the category of the non-authorized Congregations. But matters will not stop here. Religious life in France is doomed to destruction unless something unforeseen interferes to stop M. Combes' anti-

clerical policy. Already the word has gone forth that the Government does not regard previous authorization by the State as anything more than an approval accorded for a period. What the State has once authorized, says M. Combes, it can at some future time, if it thinks proper, declare to be non-authorized. This being so, we may at any time expect to see the members of the now authorized bodies, numbering some fifty-five thousand religious, added to the list of the proscribed, which means that their property will be seized by the State, and that they will be cast out into the world.

Nor, we may be sure, will that be the last act in the tragedy now being enacted before our eyes in France. Already it has been made clear, even to those who might have had any doubt previously about M. Combes' object, that the suppression of the religious Orders is merely an incident in a general campaign against the Catholic Church. The two circulars addressed to the bishops of France last April directing them what preachers they were to employ in their pulpits, and ordering them to close all churches and places of pilgrimage which were not strictly parochial, are in themselves plain indications of the lengths M. Combes is prepared to go; just as the almost universal refusal of the bishops to obey these mandates is proof that they understand the situation in the same way, and are ready to suffer any pains and penalties rather than be unfaithful to the duties of their sacred charge. What possible explanation, too, can be given of M. Combes' prohibiting the priests of Brittany and of the Basque provinces to give religious instruction to the children of their parishes or to preach except in the French tongue, except that he desired to put a stop to religious teaching of all kinds, seeing that multitudes of the parents and children of these districts only understand the Breton or the Basque languages? The words of the Bishop of Orleans addressed to the religious of his diocese on March 24th of this year, represent no more than the truth. He advised them to remain at their posts and keep open their schools, their refuges for the sick and aged, their crèches for infants and their private hospitals, until they were turned out by force.

"Reverend Mother," he continued, "the object of attack

by the decrees against the Congregations is not you and your communities, but God Himself. It is impossible now to make a mistake on this point. It is against God and Christianity that all this persecution is directed. It is not because the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul wear a grey dress; it is not because the Sacré Coeur nuns wear a black one, that they are being driven from the teaching profession. The reason, and the only reason, is that you all, sisters and nuns alike, teach the Christian faith. God is the enemy. God is to be exiled from the soul of the young child. . . . It is not difficult to foresee what the future conduct of our present masters will be. Yesterday they drove out those religious Orders who did not ask for authorization. To-day they are driving out those who did solicit it. To-morrow they will close all the teaching establishments which are at present authorized. The day after they will close the central houses, the *maisons mères*, whither they are now forcing you to go. The Congregations of France must understand that, as long as the present state of things continues in the political world, their case is pre-judged and hopeless and that they must endure much desolation and bitter trial."

Since the Bishop wrote these words events have justified his forecast. M. Combes is carried along on the flood he has let loose. There were indications that even he, like the real originator of the mischief, M. Waldeck-Rousseau, would have wished to pause in his career of destruction, and would, temporarily at least, have closed down the flood-gates. The very financial condition of France should be sufficient to make him desirous not to add to its burdens. Having already to face large annual deficits in the revenue of the country, it is hard to understand how any statesman can contemplate the additional expenditure necessitated by the suppression of schools and hospitals and asylums which the religious had supported. An immediate expenditure of over £1,000,000 for the building of new schools; of £190,000 for fitting them up; and of something like half a million yearly for the payment of new teachers in them, is the official calculation of what M. Combes' policy in regard to schools is going to cost. Then it has been stated on authority that there are at least 250,000 old and invalid people who have been hitherto

supported by the charity, clothed by the charity, served by the charity of the religious. These can hardly be left to starve on the roads and in the fields of fair France. What will they cost the nation? What is the least? Shall we say £10 a head? Even then we have a yearly expenditure of £2,500,000 and no provision made for sheltering them. Nothing less than madness and a senseless hatred of religion, could have initiated so suicidal a policy when, as is obvious to the most superficial observer, the public revenue, in spite of the high rate of taxation, does not nearly suffice to meet the current and necessary expenditure. And yet this is only the beginning.

Beyond the mere monetary question, there is also the serious doubt raised by competent men as to the possibility of the Government being able to furnish proper teaching in secondary schools to replace the professors they have exiled. M. Brunetière, in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, stated his belief that the persecuting policy of the Government will cost some millions of francs for secondary education. As for primary education M. Combes' law destroys some 1,650 schools, and the teaching brothers alone instructed some 300,000 children. M. Ferdinand Buisson, an authority well known and recognized in France, considers that a grave peril to the State has been created by the necessary appointment of inexperienced, ill-educated, and untrained teachers to take the posts rendered vacant by the present policy of the Government.

But the grave injury inflicted upon the State by the laws against the Congregations is not our concern as foreigners. We are interested, of course, only, or mainly, in the religious side of the question, and the other matter is important only as showing how the Government, with full knowledge of the cost, determined to persevere in its work of destruction, and is thus betraying its animus and its real motive. It was obvious enough in the debates which accompanied the passing and the execution of the law. "Whether just or unjust," "whether it will be costly or even ruinous to the nation," we will have the law of suppression, so said the party which *en bloc* so ably supports M. Combes. What is it that impels them? There can be no doubt whatever. It is passion, and it is hatred; and their hatred is not merely against religious life, but

hatred of the Catholic religion; of Christianity; and even of God Himself. It is the spirit of M. Paul Bert—forgotten though he may now be—triumphant and in activity. Already the body of governmental supporters in the Chamber are clamouring for a denunciation of the Concordat with the Pope. What that may mean the future alone can tell. Whilst some on the Catholic side would welcome the rupture, as giving the Church freedom of action and an initiative it does not now possess, others see in any denunciation of the Concordat the beginning of yet greater religious difficulties. They point out—with what truth it is impossible for us, strangers, foreigners, as we are, to say—that, as planned by the enemies of the Church, the abolition of the Concordat would mean that every diocese and every parish in the country would fall under the Law of Associations, which has struck and destroyed the religious Orders. No bishop could administer any see, and no parish could employ any priest to administer the Sacraments of the Church, except by the authorization of the Chamber of Deputies and according to any conditions it might impose. The Archbishop of Albi declares that if M. Pressensé's Bill for the abolition of the Concordat is accepted, not only will the Church lack bread; but that she would suffer from want of cohesion. The Archbishop of Toulouse thinks that its revocation "would condemn French Catholicism to a long period of anarchy"; and the Archbishop of Aix, whilst calling attention to the fact that it is for the Pope to settle what is to be done, says that "there is every reason to fear that the separation of Church and State would only result in reducing Catholics and their institutions to a kind of outlawry." What that will mean I need not stop to point out.

What, however, is of interest and of importance for us to try and understand is how this state of affairs has come about. France is by name at least a Catholic country, and there is hardly any doubt that the country as a whole disapproves of the persecuting policy of the present Republican Government. The power, however, has been captured by a small but well-organized body of French Freemasons, who have long prepared for the time when they would be in a position to make and administer the law. Something must be wrong somewhere, when it is possible for

36,000 (which is the utmost number of the French Masons) to coerce a nation of 37,000,000. Masonry in France, it must be remembered, is undisguisedly anti-Christian and anti-religious. It will be within the memory of most here that the English Masons broke off all relations with their French brethren, when these latter formally expunged the name of God from their charter and documents. When French Masons hold the power, then, it is to be expected that the nation will witness anti-religious legislation, which, should they think themselves strong enough, will stop at nothing. The danger ahead was long ago foreseen by Cardinal Newman. "Hitherto," he says, "the civil Power has been Christian. Even in countries separated from the Church, as in my own, the *dictum* was in force, when I was young, that: 'Christianity was the law of the land.' Now, everywhere that goodly framework of society which is the creation of Christianity is throwing off Christianity. The *dictum* to which I have referred, with a hundred others which followed upon it, is gone, or is going everywhere; and by the end of the century, unless the Almighty interferes, it will be *forgotten*. Hitherto, it has been considered that religion alone, with its supernatural sanctions, was strong enough to secure submission of the masses of our population to law and order; now the philosophers and politicians are bent on satisfying this problem without the aid of Christianity. . . . As to religion, it is a private luxury, which a man must pay for, and which he must not obtrude upon others, or indulge in to their annoyance." Strangely enough these last words re-echo the expressed sentiments of a Frenchman who the other day declared that the open churches, the Catholic symbols, and the places of pilgrimages were too aggressive to be long tolerated, and that the people in power would never rest till they had obliged people to keep their religion to themselves, and not obtrude it upon their neighbours.

Several causes have contributed to facilitate the capture of supreme power by the anti-religious party. The weight of the official votes is very considerable. Every one connected with the Government in any way, from the Prefect of a Department to the smallest shopkeeper with a tobacco licence in the smallest village, has an interest, and a direct interest in keeping the Government in

power; their own position depends upon it. Recognizing the great importance of the official vote, it has been the persistent policy of the Republican Government for a long time past to increase the number of the *fonctionnaires* by every means in their power. To-day these pocket-voters, who can be relied upon, form a very large body. Then the tyranny exercised by the Government over their officials is undoubted. Any act of religion, or any support given to Catholic charity, or any sympathy manifested for the clerical party in any way, is duly reported to headquarters and goes against a Government *employé* when the question of promotion comes to be considered. Public life is made incompatible with religion. It is difficult to credit the lengths to which this is carried. A friend of mine has a brother in the French navy; he has mounted in his profession with considerable distinction, and has had the command of a torpedo-boat. He has been informed within recent times that it will militate against his career if he goes much to church. He may go without difficulty when he accompanies his wife and child, but unless thus unofficially with his family, he should avoid going if he wants to rise in the service. Even when he goes with his wife, he is advised not to take a book of prayers with him, so as not to make a parade of his religion!

How is it that a people, the majority of whom are at least nominal Catholics, stand by and allow this kind of thing? I fear that it must be said that the curse of the Church of France has been, and is, apathy and indifference. The Catholic party has no doubt identified the Catholic cause too much in the past with the monarchy, and when the Pope would urge all to rally to the existing form of government, it is to be feared that they have indeed retired from their old organizations, but have not thrown themselves into the working of others. They have shut their eyes and slept whilst the godless republican organizations have prepared their way, silently but surely, for the governmental *coup d'état* which they have so successfully carried out.

At the bottom of all, however, is Apathy—the curse against which Montalembert raised a warning voice forty years ago. At the great Catholic Conference at Malines on 18 August, 1863, he spoke on this important subject in

the presence of Cardinal Wiseman and of between two and three thousand Catholics. Under the sceptical and indifferent government of Louis Philippe, he reminded his fellow-countrymen, "the clergy had regained a little of the legitimate influence which the favours accorded them at the Restoration had caused them to lose." What use, he asked, had they made of it? Had they organized themselves? Had they taken their part and share in public life? or had they been living in the past and looking for a return to what they might love and revere in the Middle Ages but which had gone for ever. Before answering the questions his thought had suggested, he uttered what we must consider to-day as almost prophetic words of warning to those who would rest in their apparent security. "If there should happen to-day," he said, "a new revolution, one shudders to think of the reprisals which would be exacted from the clergy for the illusory alliance which has apparently existed now for some years between the Church and the Empire."

The orator then went on to criticize the attitude of Catholics:

"Everywhere," he says, "they are inferior to their adversaries in public life, since they have not yet taken their places in the great revolution which has brought into existence the new society, the modern life of the peoples. They experience an insurmountable embarrassment and timidity face to face with modern society. It causes them fear. They have not yet learnt to know, or love, or use it. Many of them still belong to the old *régime* heart and soul and count not the cost: that is they belong to a *régime* which admits neither civil equality, nor political freedom, nor liberty of conscience. This old *régime* had no doubt its high and great mission. I do not pretend to judge it, still less to condemn it. It suffices to know one thing, but that is everything: it is dead! It will never come to life again, nor any part of it."

Then, after insisting that it was useless, criminal, hazardous in the extreme to hanker after the past and neglect the duties of the day, Montalembert added:

"It is not sufficient that the renunciation (of the past) be tacit and even sincere. It must be known to all and recognized by all: it is necessary to protest frankly, boldly

and publicly against any idea of returning to a state of things the very thought of which only serves to irritate and disquiet modern society."

Had these weighty words of the great Montalembert been listened to, things might have been very different for the Church of France to-day. Unfortunately their whole drift and tenor was misunderstood and misrepresented, with the result that it seems to have been almost a point of honour for the clergy to live in the unreality of the past and for the Catholic laity to refuse to take their position as citizens of a great republic. We can all of us remember the time, not so long ago, when not to be a supporter of the monarchy and monarchical ideas was regarded by our French friends as the mark of an indifferent and even bad Catholic. To such a pitch was the hostility to the existing form of government carried that men, just because they desired to show that they were true to their religion, would not even vote for those who were to represent them in their Parliament. I well remember staying some years ago with an excellent Catholic family during the progress of an election and being amazed at the obstinate determination of the father to take no part in returning any representative to Parliament; and this is but a sample of what we have all of us heard of on all hands. To use a homely expression, the Catholic party have been "cutting off their noses to spite their faces," whilst their adversaries have been working and organizing and consolidating their forces. Now there is a call for action. "We Catholics have been asleep for years," writes the editor of one French journal. "The attitude of Catholics is a distressing psychological problem," writes another. "The whole affair is a severe lesson to us to marshal and organize our forces," says a third. Parties, however, are not made in a day, and it will take many a long year to build up organizations which should have been in existence for the past half-century.

M. Brunetière well sums up the situation in the last number of the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. It is easy to set great forces, especially religious forces and prejudices, in motion. The difficulty is to stop them at will. M. Waldeck-Rousseau can understand this, for he is no longer able to do what he was pledged to do by every consideration of honour. The turn of M. Combes has yet to

come. "To whom do we owe the present disorders that afflict France?" asks Brunetière. "To those who ought as statesmen to have secured us against them. It is their politics that have caused all the evil. If God can say to the sea, 'Thou shalt go no further!' neither M. Combes nor M. Waldeck-Rousseau can say it to the movement they have provoked. There was a talk of suppressing certain Congregations, and they have suppressed all Congregations of men, and are engaged in doing the same for those of women. All this they maintain they are doing in the interests of the secular clergy, and in the name of the Concordat which they desire to see better respected. The disorder is carried into the churches, and M. Combes has no better means of dealing with it than suppressing the pay of the curés. Is not this a question of the secular clergy? Is this not a question of *culte* which the Concordat guaranteed and organized?" But what of that? The Concordat itself is denounced, and M. Combes has spoken of this grave question receiving a possible, a probable, and even an immediate solution, with an imprudence and a levity which have served only to excite his followers to fresh assaults against the Charter of the Church's liberty in France. What the near future will bring it would be impossible and unprofitable to forecast. One thing seems certain: things have to be worse before they will mend.

Even at the last hour M. Waldeck-Rousseau's conscience seems to have been aroused. A week ago he raised his voice in the Senate in denunciation of M. Combes' action, declaring that his Bill had contemplated legalizing and not suppressing the religious congregations. He charged M. Combes with a dishonourable breach of the understanding upon which the measure of 1901, known as the "Law of Associations," had passed into law. Thus, he said, "is created a complicated situation in the presence of which the ordinary means of government do not appear to suffice." This declaration of the statesman responsible for the original measure may do something to clear him of complicity, but it is to be feared that he is powerless to stay the on-rushing torrent which he set loose and the effects of which he should previously as a statesman have considered and discounted.

For us the lesson should not be thrown away. We

Catholics of Great Britain, I fear, suffer more or less from the disease of apathy. We too do not always take our part in the life of our country and make our influence felt where it well might be of use. It is our duty not alone as citizens, but for the sake of our faith, and in order to have the means within our power when the time comes, as come it will, to defend the principles we hold so dear, at least in theory. And so, whilst sympathizing with all our hearts in the troubles which have befallen the Catholics of France, and whilst protesting with all our strength, in the name of freedom and liberty of conscience, against the action of the unbelieving Government of that country, let us take the lesson to heart and, throwing aside party and prejudice, stand together as Catholics, if and when the need shall arise, for the defence of Catholic principles and the protection of Catholic interests.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since the above address was delivered many things have happened in France. The religious question is still, however, the burning question of practical politics, only that it has grown, if possible, more acute. M. Combes, in steadily pursuing his persecuting policy, has won further successes, and his Ministry has manifested a stability which no one would have prophesied for it. M. Waldeck-Rousseau, roused by frequent appeals to him, in the name of common honesty, to dissociate himself from the actions of his successor, has made an attempt to stay the onrush of the torrents he had himself let loose, and he has been swept aside in the process. The English Benedictine property at Douai has been sold, for a sum wholly inadequate, to the town authorities, and the proceeds have been placed to the credit of the Benedictines in the sum administered by the *Bureau des Fondations Anglaises*. But as the revenue derived from our property must be spent in France, and as we are not permitted to exist as religious in France, we can obviously derive no benefit from this or from our other funds held by the same trustees. Meanwhile the furniture

and all other movables of the old English Benedictine college, which had been purchased with English money, or had been the gifts of English friends to the English monks, have been sold by public auction for what they would fetch.

The foreseen also has happened in regard to the authorized Congregations. In their turn they have received notice to quit. Some months ago, M. Combes practically accepted a suggestion that no instruction should be allowed to be given by any member of a religious Congregation, even if the body were in possession of State approbation. A Bill to provide for this has since been drafted and offered for the acceptance of the anti-clerical majority who, *en bloc*, have for some time done M. Combes' bidding. The result of this Bill will be to destroy denominational education in France altogether. By it the State revokes previous authorization, and although the teaching Orders may continue for a few years, since the Government are wholly unable to supply their places at once, it is provided that the Ministry may at any time decree the closure of their schools at its convenience. Meanwhile these Congregations may not receive any new subjects, and are to send in at once a complete list of all members. When this Bill comes into operation no fewer than 3,492 Catholic schools will be closed. Of these 1,299 are boys' schools, many of them large establishments and all taught by the Christian Brothers, the rest, that is 2,195, are girls' schools, taught by various orders of nuns. This is what the *Temps* calls "the latest attack on the Liberal principle," which has been made, wholly without regard to what it will cost the nation in hard cash, by M. Combes' Ministry. According to this latest law, in five years' time at the latest, all the authorized teaching Orders will have shared the fate of their non-authorized brethren and sisters, and except for a small number of authorized contemplatives and a somewhat larger number of authorized nursing communities (if they are spared, which is not likely), the religious life will have been banished from France.

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